The High-level Political Forum (HLPF) is an annual meeting that takes place at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It serves as the central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2019 HLPF included thematic dialogues on the theme “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality,” and an in-depth review of SDGs 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 13 (Climate Action), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The HLPF is also the venue for the voluntary reviews of the 2030 Agenda which include developed and developing countries as well as relevant UN entities and other stakeholders. The reviews are state-led, involving ministerial and other relevant high-level participants, and provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders. In 2019, 47 countries (7 for the second time) volunteered to present their national voluntary reviews to the HLPF. For more details, please click here. Apart from the official sessions, the HLPF offers an opportunity for government representatives, UN experts, and civil society from all over the world to come together in side events to discuss specific experiences, challenges and good practices related to different thematic or geographical areas. The following are the reflections and reports of the GSJP Office team in New York who attended the 2019 HLPF: Winifred Doherty, Alexis Schutz, Cecilie Kern, and Caileigh Finnegan.
The afternoon of the opening day of this year’s High-Level Political Forum was focused on the thematic review of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Education. Goal 4 of the SDGs calls on the global community to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” And while many countries were originally progressing on the achievement of this goal, progress has stalled in many places to get children in school and where children are in school, other targets of the goal are left uncompleted.

Each goal is reviewed in the same manner. Over a three-hour period, two panels present on the goal from different perspectives, offering an analysis of the gaps, progress and best practices of the goal. In between the panels, governments and other stakeholders are given the chance to give two to three-minute statements or ask questions. While the conversation is meant to be interactive, very little meaningful interaction happens between panelists, states and civil society. The time limitations and structure of the program make it near impossible to encourage interactive dialogue even for the most skilled moderator.

Goal 4 is about more than just getting children into school. It is about making sure that all children, no matter their gender, ability, socioeconomic status, class, race, ethnicity, or migrant status, have access and are enrolled in free, quality and inclusive education. In thinking about the girl child, we know that this also means having schools that are equipped with proper facilities and water and sanitation. The goal also requires access to life-long learning and skills training for all and making sure that teachers are properly trained and compensated for the work they do. Achieving all of this, as mentioned in the review, requires a transformation of the education and learning systems.

The continued issue of privatization of education was raised a few times by both civil society and governments, both in favor and against. One of the key targets of SDG 4 is ensur-
Review of SDG 4, continued

ing education is free. With the wave of private investors getting involved in the Sustainable Development Goals, privatization of public education is becoming an easy way for governments to say that they are making progress on the goal without investing the needed amount of money into education infrastructure and projects throughout their countries. The privatization of education impacts the most vulnerable and furthest behind. It means that people living in poverty are left out of accessing education and in households with both boys and girls, the choice is often made to pay for the boy to go through schooling over the girl. In places where there are options between free public and paid private education, we have seen over and over that the public option is often underfunded by the government and less quality than the private. Privatizing education enhances inequalities and stalls progress of SDG 4, 5, 10 and beyond. A handful of governments bragged about the partnerships that they are building between the private sector and the education sector as a success while civil society called out the many issues that come from the privatization of education. Privatization is not the way forward because private companies will always put profit over the needs of people.

The three-hour conversation touched on the above issues and many more relating to the achievement of SDG 4 and from this conversation many voices from civil society came to the conclusion that now is the time for a paradigm shift in education. Ms. Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education of UNESCO called for two key actions in regards to this shift. We need to change the mindset around the way we learn and teach. This takes transformation and innovation. A transformation that happens through true partnership between governments and civil society. A transformation that makes education truly inclusive, quality and accessible.

Review of SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all - By Alexis Schutz

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The thematic review of SDG 8 occurred on the second day of official meetings of the HLPF. Despite a mostly disappointing review of SDG 4 the day before, I had some hope that the review of the day would be somewhat productive. Instead, the review of SDG 8 was even more disappointing than that of SDG 4. Governments focused almost exclusively on economic growth while civil society attempted to highlight that the way we are currently pursuing SDG 8 is unsustainable and will not lead us to achieving the goals.

SDG 8 aims to ‘promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.’ Within in this goal is target 8.7 which reads ‘Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.’ This target is particularly important to the work we do and had almost no mention throughout the three-hour meeting. Only Bangladesh mentioned 8.7 but only in terms of migrant workers and their initiative to provide identification to all migrant workers. They mentioned the need for a human rights-based approach but did not call for accelerated action on ending child labor.

The conversation began with statistical highlights from the Secretary General’s SDG Progress Report. The report emphasized the sluggish GDP growth and the regional inequality on growth. It also highlighted the growing rates of youth unemployment and that ⅕ of world’s youth were not gaining experience or education. A few countries shared the work they were doing to improve youth employment rates. Many of these plans included skills training and other ways to make the job markets more accessible.

The conversation lacked a connection between SDG 8 and any of the other SDGs. I would have found it particularly useful to connect conversations from the day before (SDG 4 Review) on life-long learning and skills training with the conversation around high youth unemployment rates and insecure jobs. I would have also liked to have seen more of a connection between SDG 8 and 10. It is not useful to discuss economic growth without addressing the rapidly growing inequality that we are faced with globally. If we are truly going to have ‘inclusive economic growth’ then we need to be hav-
ing a conversation on the structural nature of inequality at the same time. Without this, economic growth will continue to benefit those on top and leave the rest of the world further and further behind.

There was practically no mention of informal markets, which we know women are disproportionately represented in. Mexico, in particular, shared their concern for their country’s low rates of unemployment but high rates of informal employment. Guatemala also shared the concern that while their employment rates seem acceptable in terms of the indicators of the goals, they are facing high rates of informal employment. Both countries called for a need to be making sure that when measuring decent work, we are not just looking at if someone has a job but if they are in a stable job. Adding to that, the jobs should be safe and include fair wages. This is important for all people but especially for marginalized people. Sweden highlighted that they have high rates of immigrant women and people with disabilities in these precarious jobs. Being that the conversation on informal work is such a key part of SDG 8, I was deeply disappointed in the lack of mention of the issue and lack of solutions and best practices offered.

Another aspect of the SDG 8 conversation was the future of work and what technology will do to the world of work. Ms. Xiaolan Fu, Professor and Founding Director, Technology and Management Centre for Development spoke on the fact that with the current state of technology advancement, inequalities will continue to grow as tech advances. She gave recommendations on how to best stop this: develop digital skills through education; build digital competencies through international partnerships; reinvigorate a multilateral trade system; and ensure responsible use of digital technology. There should have been more discussion on the connection between growing inequalities and advancing technology throughout the meeting. There is a clear connection between regulating IT companies and ensuring decent work for all that was overlooked.

While there were many discouraging moments throughout the meeting, civil Society continually made statements that drew attention to the need to think beyond GDP growth when talking about inclusive and sustainable economic growth. The Major Group on Children and Youth, gave a powerful statement reflecting on the planetary boundaries that are ignored for the sake of endless economic growth. The current plan for SDG 8 is not sustainable and overlooks people and planet. We need to rethink the ways we measure growth and decent work in order to respect human rights and the earth.

**Review of SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels - By Caileigh Finnegan**

To start of this presentation on SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) the commentators brought up how without the implementation of SDG 16, the world will see a vast increase of violence, and that right now there is a growing human trafficking problem. A key speaker brought up some vital points about how currently there has not been a lot of improvements in achieving SDG 16 and that as of 2018 there were about 70 million people fleeing war and conflict. At the core of this goal is making sure no one is left behind and it is seen by many as the moral backbone of the entire 2030 Agenda.

A major point brought up during this event was how imperative bringing the voices of children, youth, and minorities into the conversation is. Millions of children are being affected everyday by violence and it is affecting their schooling more than ever. Violence at schools makes it hard to send children there, and violence and conflict in communities makes it unsafe to send children out alone into the streets. Not putting a stop to this violence will not only result in more deaths but will also affect many other aspects of communities.

The former President of Costa Rica brought up how in Latin America, 8 out of 10 children suffer from mental illness, which is something we should all be alarmed by. This not only affects the way these children live their lives everyday but also affects their performance at school academically and socially. Not to mention all the issues that will arise when these children become adults and enter the workforce if the issues they are facing are not addressed. These kinds of problems are not single issues, they affect many different aspects of community life and how the country will be run.
There were two youth speakers present who provided brief statements regarding what it is like being youth advocates and how they believe change should be made. One thing that was emphasized by these youth speakers was how this vital information about the future and the discussion of the future in general needs to include children and youth and how there needs to be platforms for the youth to share their experiences and ideas on how to help and especially how violence in schools in incredibly detrimental. Violence in school will not only affect test scores, eventually it will affect business, the economy, and the state.

A major issue that has been seen across the globe that is aiding in the regression of the implementation of SDG 16 is the community’s distrust of the police force, so reports of crimes has lessened and people do not feel that when they call the police they will be helped. Communities that participate in achieving these goals, especially SDG 16 is the only way to see the world change the way we want it to. Without grassroots participation there is no hope if full implementation, but in saying that there needs to be laws and governmental support that protects the grassroots and also informs them.

Migration is one of the defining features of the 21st century, and the 2030 Agenda recognizes the role of international migration in achieving inclusive social and economic development. Many of the SDGs and their targets include references to issues that relate directly to international migration, migrants, and mobility. These include targets under each of the goals that were under review this year for the HLPF, such as migrants’ equal access to quality services (e.g. education), decent working environments for migrants, orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration, migration in the context of climate change and disasters, and ending trafficking as well as exploitation of migrants. It is clear that migration will have a significant impact on the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, many of the SDGs can only be fully achieved if migrants and their contributions to development are taken into account. Conversely, differing development outcomes are likely to influence migration patterns well into the future.

In the official review of SDG 10, migration was a recurring theme. SDG 10 is to “reduce inequality within and among countries”. Its 10 targets capture multiple drivers of inequality to ensure that no group or individual is left behind. Its targets address both within-country inequality across social, economic and political dimensions, aiming to expand prosperity, inclusion, and social protection, as well as inequality among countries, with attention to cross-border flows of finance and people and the distribution of voice in global institutions. SDG 10 includes Target 10.7, which calls on Member States to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. The various expert panelists, government delegates and civil society representatives explained that while there has been some positive movement on SDG 10 targets, progress has been mixed across countries and regions. The marginalization of women migrant workers engaged in informal work, the criminalization of migrant children and families, and issues of xenophobia and discrimination all surfaced in the discussion. A number of Member States mentioned that inequalities are often a root cause of migration, but also that safe, orderly and regular migration that respects the human rights and contributions of migrants are necessary for sustainable development. In order to accelerate the achievement of SDG 10, policy approaches need to put people who are most affected by inequalities, including migrants and refugees, at the center of the process. People who are marginalized economically or socially are the actors and enablers for SDG10 and will see the greatest gains from reduced inequality.

A number of side events explored the interlinkages and synergies between migration and the SDGs. In each of these events, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) adopted in December 2018 was raised as an important new tool for realizing the migration-related SDGs. The GCM is explicitly grounded in the 2030 Agenda, with Sustainable Development as one of the ten guiding principles, and the 23 objectives which provide a roadmap of concrete actions to realize the SDGs, especially 10.7.

On 11 July, Ecuador as Chair of the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) in 2019 hosted a side event on the contribution of the GFMD to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Ecuador and Germany as one of the former...
chairs of the GFMD presented the recommendations of the GFMD to the HLPF, as the migration/development nexus has been the focus of the GFMD since its inception in 2007. The GFMD’s report highlights all of the linkages, both explicit and implicit, between migration and the 2030 Agenda, including explicit migration-related targets, targets that address the specific vulnerability and protection gaps specific to migrants, targets that could benefit from the potential of migration and migrants, targets that address drivers of migration including employment and poverty alleviation, and targets that aim at developing adaptation strategies in order to reduce the consequences caused by climate change. It also points to emerging concerns in global migration and development policies, including the role of the GFMD in linking these areas, advancing the dialogue and promoting concrete partnerships following the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration. In typical GFMD fashion, the event not only was a discussion among governments, but also included a multi-stakeholder approach, featuring the contributions of civil society, the business mechanism, local authorities, and UN partners, including IOM, ILO and UNDP, who all play an important and practical role in the implementation of migration and development objectives.

The next day, on 12 July, the multi-stakeholder discussion continued, as the Civil Society Action Committee, the NGO Committee on Migration, and the Major Group on Children and Youth organized a event entitled “A New Era in Global Migration and Development Governance: A Multi-Stakeholder Roundtable Dialogue on Advancing Global Compact for Migration Objectives and Sustainable Development Goals.” Seven months after the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration, which incorporates a strong whole-of-society approach, participants had the opportunity to discuss the cooperation is already happening, both explicitly and implicitly with the SDGs and the GCM, and to begin to elaborate new ideas for collaboration. Andres Montalvo, the Head of the GFMD Task-Force from Ecuador discussed the role of the GFMD as an incubator for innovative ideas that are truly multi-stakeholder in nature. The Global Compact for Migration, the Global Compact on Refugees and the 2030 Agenda show the convergence between migration and development and the possibility for growth and consensus among States. Representatives from the GFMD Mayor’s Mechanism, Business Mechanism, and Civil Society Mechanism, the Major Group on Children and Youth, and from the UN Network on Migration all spoke from their perspectives about their appreciation of the GFMD as a space for collaboration between all stakeholders to create synergy and cooperation for improved migration governance, and about their contributions to the implementation and follow-up of the Global Compact for Migration, moving from the global level to the local level, from words into practices. A representative from Mexico, one of the chairs of the Group of Friends of Migration emphasized the role of civil society as addressing the needs of migrants in vulnerable situations, and reiterated the need to have a practical, pragmatic, ground-up, multi-stakeholder approach to implementation of the GCM. It was clear from all participants that partnership and collaboration will be instrumental to the achievement of the objectives of the Global Compact, to fulfill the rights and potential of migrants and their communities.

On 17 July, Antonio Vittorino, the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration hosted an event featuring the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI), a voluntary tool developed by IOM in response to the 2030 Agenda to help Member State to assess their migration policies. The MGI consists of 90 indicators, covering a wide range of thematic issues as they relate to migration (labor, health, border management, disaster risk reduction, among others). To date, 50 governments and three cities have used the MGI to review their migration policies, identify good practices and gaps, and set priorities for the future. Representatives from Canada, Kuwait and the Dominican Republic presented outcomes of their MGI assessments, and shared how their
governments have used the MGI to evaluate their migration policies, as a basis for new evidence-based policies, to form a baseline to track progress on their national and international commitments, and to assess common and pressing challenges with neighboring countries. John Wilmoth, the Director of the Population of the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs spoke about the value of the MGI in developing the SDG indicators for Target 10.7. IOM hopes that the MGI will be able to expand to help even more countries and cities in the future.

At the same time as the HLPF, there were some other meetings related to the UN structures that will facilitate the implementation, follow-up and review of the Global Compact for Migration. On 16 July, the UN Migration Network and the chairs of the Friends of Migration hosted the New York launch of the Start-up Fund for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The creation of the Start-Up Fund, also known as the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund (or Migration MPTF) was called for in the Global Compact for Migration to support its implementation. The Start-up Fund receives voluntary financial contributions by Member States and other stakeholders. It is the only funding mechanism fully dedicated to supporting collective action on migration. High-level speakers supported the launch, including Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, the Director-General of both IOM and ILO, the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, the Vice President of Costa Rica, as well as representatives from Mexico, Germany, the UK, a UN Resident Coordinator, and a youth from civil society. All underlined the importance of the Global Compact for Migration as a step forward for migration governance, and that the Fund is necessary so that there are sufficient resources for government and civil society projects, international cooperation, and shared responsibility. In supporting the Fund, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to a people-centered and human rights-based approach to migration that addresses structural factors and root causes, among the other aspects of migration, complementing their other development programming. There was a collective expectation that if properly supported, the Start-Up Fund can provide the impetus to bring the GCM to life, to move us closer to realizing the SDGs, and to effect positive change in the field of migration, and that a contribution to the Fund is a declaration of commitment to the goals of the GCM and the spirit of international cooperation that underpins them, as well as an investment in a more prosperous future for all, one in which no one is left behind.

The other meetings were related to the finalization and adoption of the modalities resolution for the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF), the meeting that will serve as the central space to review the progress and challenges related to the Global Compact for Migration. The resolution includes the details about the venue, time and duration of the IMRF, who will be able to participate (including civil society), what will be done to prepare for the meeting, the organization of the Forum itself, and instructions on how the Progress Declaration will be contained and what it will contain. The resolution was finally adopted after a vote by the General Assembly the day after the closing of the HLPF, on 19 July. The regional review of the Global Compact for Migration will begin next year in 2020 and the first IMRF will take place in 2022. It will be important for those of us engaged in work with migrants to be ready to share our experiences, good practices and challenges to ensure a robust and substantive review of the GCM.

A significant counter narrative to the official HLPF discourse can be had in the ‘Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2019 Reshaping governance for sustainability – transforming institutions - shifting power – strengthening rights. The report launched on July 11 calls for serious shifts in major policy and a real re-thinking of the public sector. Presenters demonstrated how current structures actually reinforce inequality. Austerity measures do not favour implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda. Changing power imbalances in the educational field are prioritizing a market driven education model
Engaging with Counter Narratives to Official HLPF Discourse, continued

hinder vulnerable groups’ access to education. Gentlemen’s agreements in international governance are antithetical to the spirit of the 2030 agenda because they solidify inequality between states (SDG 10) and reinforce structures of patriarchy and gender inequality. In presenting a reflection on the intersection between gender and conflict resolution is was noted that militaries have often been considered the solution but in practice, traditional military masculinity can worsen gender inequality and undermine global security. The last presenter made a recommendation to check business interests at the international level with a binding treaty linking business and human rights in order to secure public funding for the 2030 Agenda and bring it away from the whims of private donors. Macro-economic policy, and current trade agreements are antithetical to peace, justice, and equality. The report is online (http://www.socialwatch.org/report2019) where it is possible to download individual chapters.

An event titled “National Reports on 2030 Agenda: What do They (Not) Tell Us?” continued the earlier discussion but focusing on the Voluntary National Reviews. (VNR’s) Panelists explored a range of hopes and experiences from great opportunities to hold governments accountable to their actions to presentations that are riddled with misrepresentation and power imbalance. Panelists referred to major challenges within the current systems that impede and are contrary to the 2030 Agenda - inequalities, extra-territorial impacts and spillovers, tax havens, arms flows, power asymmetries with some countries having more policy space and fiscal space than others etc., while at the same time seeking to identify better review processes. While the HLPF aspires to be a mechanism for review and follow up, “it has become a marketplace for a lot of ideas and priorities.” (Barbara Adams). We need an international mechanism to hold Member States accountable to what is presented. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Professor for International Affairs at the New School noted that 41 of the 47 VNRs presented in 2018 made reference to “leaving no one behind” idea, yet less than half addressed any commitment to giving priority to help those furthest behind first. See: http://www.socialwatch.org/node/18319

Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda Side Event—By Caileigh Finnegan

The Human Rights and 2030 Agenda side event held on Thursday, July 11, 2019 focused on ensuring that a human rights based approach is taken towards SDG planning. Through this event the emphasis was put on how without human rights being achieved all throughout the world then the SDGs will never truly be achieved. Almost all of the speakers highlighted how the 2030 Agenda is a human rights agenda. And without ensuring that all countries are actively working not only towards reducing inequalities within their own borders but also throughout the globe then the 2030 Agenda has no hope in making a difference. All of the SDGs are also strongly linked to human rights, for example, education is a right for all and safe and proper teaching is essential for the growth of the youth. Strong education also leads to a stronger economy and the interlinkages do not end there. Many of the speakers emphasized the strong connection between the SDGs and human rights. The Permanent Representative of Chile made a comment about how the more the SDGs are implemented the more human rights that will be achieved. Human rights issues have also evolved throughout the years and they need to constantly be treated as evolving issues. There is not one solution to achieving human rights for all. Time and effort needs to be put into making this world a more inclusive place.

While every speaker at this event commented on how important human rights are and how it is imperative every human has access to these rights, there were not many specific examples given. While an overview of how education is a right for all and hearing the voices of minorities, especially indigenous people is important, no specifics or current examples were provided. However, one audience member, a youth delegate on behalf of Hong-Kong, asked the question of how can we address human rights, when those who are acting on certain rights and using their voices to talk about inequalities are being silenced? Her specific example was from the protests on the extradition bill in Hong-Kong, the protesters there had tear gas and rubber bullets used against them. Her questions got a round of applause from the participants of the event, who seemed to agree that while saying we must integrate human rights into everything is good, actions mean a lot more.
Another speaker from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) commented on how development done wrong will do more harm. So we need to be very careful and thoughtful when making and implementing change and ensuring that every person on this planet’s best interest is kept in mind. He also mentioned how the 2030 Agenda is a “scream for fundamental change” which was echoed not only in this event but at many of the other events throughout the HLPF. We cannot expect to see the change we need in the world using the same systems that got us in this mess in the first place.

### Time to Be Bold Side Event—By Alexis Schutz

One of the last events I attended was one of the most impactful of the 8 days of the HLPF. The event, titled “Time to Be Bold”, brought together a panel of women to talk about the steps that governments and civil society needed to take to tackle inequalities. The five women all came to the issue with different backgrounds and perspectives but agreed first and foremost on the need to talk about inequalities as a structural issue and the challenge of getting the UN to talk about it in those terms.

The conversation began with a two rounds of questions to the panelists from the moderator followed by questions from the audience. Njoki Njehu, Fight Inequality Alliance, kicked off the discussion with impactful sharing about what is happening at the grassroots. It was an important reminder for many of us in the room that people are working on the issue of the SDGs particularly inequalities without naming or knowing of the SDGs. Her work is grounded in the communities where the people are building solidarity to tackle the inequalities they face and they see others in their community face. She reminded us that in the places where money will not get you what you want, you need people and that we must talk about inequalities in language that everyone can understand so that we can build solidarity. Her comments were warmly received in a room full of folks who are often caught up in the UN language and continually need the reminder to bring the work of the 2030 Agenda to the grassroots. “The power of the people is stronger than the people in power.”

Chiara Marioleti of Oxfam International brought attention to the small progress made on inequalities. While we are hearing from the UN that inequalities are not getting better, a recent development, there is little being done to address the structural issues that enable inequalities to grow. There is no call for policy that completely shifts the current dynamics that foster inequality. Ms. Marioleti sees a need for a disruption of power with civil society leading this charge. A call for a strong civil society that is united in purpose is one that was mentioned throughout the two weeks of HLPF. As space for civil society voices closes many find that uniting over agreements around the need for structural change is a way to use the little space we have effectively. The fight against inequalities must be waged both at the top and the bottom, working to effect change at the highest level and at the same time working within grassroots communities on the same issues.

Irene Ovonji Odida, Commissioner, Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation, focused on the issue of tax and its effect on inequalities. She described the nexus of power of elites and corporations working with state governments against the majority. How do we take this power back? Ms. Odida presented some food for thought on this subject. Tax problems are often spoken about in highly technical ways and require experts to understand the language and systems to make recommendations and policies. She notes that everyday people are starting to see tax issues as connected to their inequality and are beginning to start learning the language. She suggests that if we understand that tax is a political problem then we can move away from it just being an expert issue. She noted three big issues within the current tax systems globally: A rush to reduce corporate tax; Seeing multinationals as single entities; An attack on the multilateral nature of the UN system. She called on civil society to do what it does best: speak boldly and call these issues out by their names. By speaking truth to power and calling out these challenges to the tax system we can begin to build a new system that works for all people and redistribute the wealth the world has in an equitable manner.

The inclusion of trade and labor unions in the discussion on inequalities is beyond valuable. Rosa Pavanelli from Public Services International discussed the role that these unions can and are playing in the fight against inequalities. She highlighted that the backlash against labor rights is deeply connected to the current state of growing inequalities.
Embrace the World

**Time to Be Bold Side Event, continued**

...and that it decent wages for workers and corporations paying fair taxes would be two easy steps towards fighting inequalities. She again raised the point that solving tax challenges and inequalities is reliant on political will. It is undesirable for the few to rule the many and with proper taxation this dynamic could shift but governments must have the will to put fair and just tax policies in place and enforce them. Specifically, with the future of AI fast approaching, governments must regulate and monitor IT companies in order to ensure that tech advancements do not grow inequality.

Peggy Hicks from OHCHR rounded out the panel with some perspective of including human rights in the conversation on inequalities and addressing the issue within the UN system. She encouraged us to think about how we include grassroots voices at the table. We need to allow people to have their voices present and included if we are really going to see change. She also touched on the need to better translate what is happening at the UN to the grassroots and also bring what is happening at the grassroots to the UN. She encouraged making connections in the 2030 Agenda and UN Agencies that are not usually made. Currently the office is working on connecting national human rights offices and national statistics offices and already are seeing the way in which this connection can affect change. Her bold action suggestion was for the UN system to work on inequalities in all departments, agencies and country offices.

The event was a breath of fresh air in that it focused on the need for transformative, structural change if we are ever going to fight inequalities and called for bold actions by both civil society and member states. I hope that we can see these bold actions move into governments and the UN system before it’s too late to achieve Agenda 2030.

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**Colour, Action and Social Media at HLPF! - By Winifred Doherty**

Much of our social media advocacy during the HLPF was under the #FEMINISTDEMAND. Snippets from the Position Paper of the Women’s Major Group were the subject matter of tweets through the 8 days always focusing systemic issues. Advocacy issues were highlighted through a color dress code of the day coupled with some demonstrations to draw attention to the issue. I attended many of these demonstrations.

July 9: “We’re at #HLPF2019 with our friends of the @Women_Rio20, wearing blue in solidarity as #SDG4 on #education is discussed. We need to ensure free and compulsory formal and non-formal, and informal education as a fundamental human right! #feministdemand “ If education is a basic human right how address the corporatization of education? To know more check out [http://Winifredd.wordpress.com](http://Winifredd.wordpress.com)

July 10: #SDG8 Decent Work and Economic Growth A global call for a women’s strike on March 8th 2020. On an average, globally women are paid 63% of what mean earn. This pay gap will take 202 years to close. Join us for a #Women’sGlobalStrike on #IWD2020 and #StopTheWorld. Fiji Women’s Rights tweeted “Resulting from their unpaid care work women experience poverty, loss of health, education, time, income and social protection and suffer from a lack of access to justice in law and in practice.”

July 12th The colour was yellow, in solidarity with the Major Group on Children and Youth and #Fridayforfuthe calling for action to reverse the climate emergency. As HLPF focused on SDG 13 (climate action), members of civil society demonstrate outside the UN Headquarters, saying ‘we need you to wake up, we need you to rise up.’

July 15th “In response to ‘Reaching for the finance! A new wave of debt crisis is upon us, and 40% of low-income countries now have severe debt problems. We did a little #debtworkout today to call for structural transformation! #FeministDemand #hlpf2019

I engaged in the #debtworkout tweeting: “We don’t need more resource! We need to challenge the scarcity myth! We need to spend the money differently turning military budgets and armory into public services for all, scaling up justice and peace with everyone at the table.”
Beijing+25 Side Event - By Caileigh Finnegan

The Gender Equality (Beijing +25 and the SDGs) side event, held on Wednesday, July 10, 2019, focused on how women and feminists can and should advocate with the feminist ideals in mind. There was also a large focus on how we can connect women’s issues to all of the SDGs and also how the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which we will commemorate next year for its 25th anniversary, can be incorporated into all the work we do.

There was a brief overview at the start of the event on why the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was needed in the first place. We discussed how women’s rights were not included in UN discussions until 1995 and it is still a struggle to make sure that our voices are heard and that the issues we face every day are being addressed head on.

During the event we broke out into groups where we not only discussed what SDGs we thought were important, but also how women’s issues and the Beijing Declaration was directly related to all of them. We also touched on how we can properly advocate for these issues and to make sure that the voices of women are included in all our conversations.

An issue that was raised during this event was how careful we need to be when selecting the language we use in our documents. There are many words we need to be careful of using and in light of trying to maintain inclusivity. For example, the word “family” refers to a nuclear heterosexual couple, while “families” is a more inclusive term that refers to all different kinds of family dynamics, whether it be a homosexual couple, a single parent, or an extended family that might include grandparents or aunts and uncles.

Later on in the event, we really started to focus on our advocacy skills. We discussed how we need to intervene wherever possible and use any time we are allotted wisely. A strong emphasis was put on how we need to always be preparing for any time to speak up for women and their rights, because the more we are aware and ready, the more persuasive we can be. Building alliances in order to work together to raise important issues is imperative. It not only shows that there are more people standing behind these issues but also gives us more space and time to advocate to a wider audience.

To wrap up the event, we role played and had certain team members prepare statements on issues that we felt strongly about. And other members would be the people we would soon advocate to. It was an exercise to strengthen our argument and to also help make us more comfortable bringing up issues and asking people for their support. Afterward we discussed some strong points of the advocacy and also what we could possible work on to do better next time.